

Integrating Advanced Physical Training Programs into the Marine Corps

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The Marine Corps is a fighting organization designed for one purpose, combat. Thus, physical fitness has long been a part of the training regimen to prepare Marines for the rigors of combat. Coincidentally, the importance of physical fitness was recently emphasized by the current Commandant of the Marine Corps who stated "As a fighting force, our ability to fulfill this commitment and accomplish the mission is dependent, in part, upon the fitness of our Marines."¹ In response, the Marine Corps' top brass recently implemented a new training requirement known as the Combat Fitness Test (CFT) in order to emphasize the importance of physical fitness amongst Marines.² While it is commendable to change the testing requirements, vis-à-vis the CFT, the Marine Corps has not done enough to improve the methods of physical training. Unfortunately, the Marine Corps has not taken advantage of the ability to produce stronger, faster, and quicker Marines in a condensed time frame through the use of the various advanced physical training programs available to the public. Therefore, the Marine Corps should integrate advanced physical training programs into its physical fitness (PT) program in order to reduce the financial strain on Marines and

¹ General James T. Conway, *ALMAR 032/08, Changes to the Marine Corps Physical Fitness Program*, <http://www.marines.mil/news/messages/Pages/CHANGESTOTHEMARINECORPSPHYSICALFITNESSPROGRAM.aspx>

² ALMAR 032/08 states that the major changes for the Marine Corps Physical Fitness Program include the Combat Fitness Test, the tightening of Body Composition Standards, and development of a Military Appearance Program.

the Marine Corps, achieve qualitative physical fitness results in less time, and most importantly, prepare Marines for the physical rigors of combat.

Reducing the financial strain on Marines and the Marine Corps

Marines are aware of the benefits of different training techniques and have been using these programs to train themselves. These training programs include P90X³, CrossFit⁴, and Nike's Speed, Power, Agility, Reaction, and Quickness (SPARQ)⁵ all of which are available to the public for use. However, the most popular training program amongst Marines is CrossFit⁶. While CrossFit is a free web-based physical training program, many gyms charge a fee to utilize their equipment for the program. They pay a fee to affiliate itself with the CrossFit program and consequently a fee is required to participate in the CrossFit

³ P90X, *Extreme Body Workout*, (unknown, P90X, Extreme Body Workout n.d.) , P90X is a home based DVD workout program designed to achieve results in 90 days at a cost of \$119.85.

⁴ CrossFit: *Forging Elite Fitness*, (unknown, CrossFit: Forging Elite Fitness n.d.), CrossFit, as advertised on its website, is a principal strength and conditioning program for many police academies and tactical operations teams, military special operations units, champion martial artists, and hundreds of other elite and professional athletes worldwide.

⁵ NIKE SPARQ Training Web Site, About Us, (unknown, Nike Sparq Training n.d.) , According to their website, its mission is to enable every athlete to reach his or her potential using natural, scientifically-based training methods.

⁶ CrossFit:
<http://www.board.crossfit.com/forumdisplay.php?s=8197e37d3f2705c235ffb47cac538859&f=15> , as accessed on 15 Dec, 2008, the main forum page was highlighted by an email from Marine SSgt Frank Ollis to the CrossFit team detailing his attempt to integrate CrossFit training into his unit physical training program.

training program.⁷ As a result, Marines pay fees when they join these gyms to surround themselves with personnel who understand the program and use the gym's equipment.

Private gyms and the physical fitness programs mentioned are profit driven and thus spend their resources in research and development in a way that the military cannot compete. Normally, the private business sector profits from military personnel who will pay out of pocket to achieve greater physical fitness. Researching and developing programs for its target market means higher profits for those businesses. The Marine Corps has a unique opportunity to benefit from the private business sector that has already conducted the research and designed programs tailored to the military's needs. The evidence and programs are already designed and working. The Marine Corps need only adapt itself to meet the needs of the Marines, many of whom are already participating in these programs.

Additionally, the Marine Corps can financially benefit from utilizing these modern training programs because the equipment required for the mentioned training programs is minimal. Many of the exercises can be done with dumbbells, barbells, jump ropes, kettle balls, pull-ups bars, and some "cardio" equipment if needed. Most of this type of equipment is already in place,

⁷ CrossFit: *Forging Elite Fitness*, Question 9.2: What is the cost of affiliation?, <http://www.crossfit.com/cf-info/faq.html#Affiliates0>

leaving little need for additional acquisition of special exercise equipment. Moreover, experience has shown that even the items mentioned, while simple in nature and ability to acquire, are not necessary to utilize advanced training techniques. For example, in 2006 the Canadian School of Infantry conducted an experiment to train in an "austere" environment performing many of the CrossFit training techniques utilizing sandbags, large rocks, and water-filled jugs.⁸ It was deemed successful proving that training can be conducted without the use of the expensive modern training equipment as used in many Semper Fit gyms. By reducing the gym's equipment to those simple training items, the Marine Corps will save a substantial amount of money helping to reduce the financial strain on the Marine Corps' budget.

Achieving results in less time (getting more for less)

Marines are constantly under time constraints, and integrating the advanced training programs into the Marine Corps' physical fitness program would save time and achieve qualitative results faster. Keeping physically fit is a challenge in large part because many new programs such as the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program⁹ (MCMAP) and cultural language

⁸ Reference to the CrossFit experiment conducted in the spring of 2006 by the Canadian School of Infantry

⁹ General J.L. Jones, *ALMAR 042/01, Establishment of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program*, 20 Sep, 2001

training¹⁰ have been added to the training schedule, and commanders are tasked to "do more with less." Yet, the Marine Corps has not provided commanders with extra hours to accomplish all of the required training and as Maj Robert H. Duryea notes "units seldom achieve training plans of the highest quality because commanders lack the knowledge and time to provide a high-quality physical conditioning program".¹¹ By utilizing the advanced training programs that are scripted for use, commanders can maximize training time rather than planning training sessions. As a result, the competing priority of planning the physical training session is removed and the Marines can focus on the physical training.

Another benefit of these advanced training programs is their enhanced qualitative result in significantly less time. Many of the programs are designed in a manner that maximizes the physical result in less time than traditional methods of exercise. This attracts Marines who need to make the most of their time. Marines can seize the opportunity to spend their saved time on the other training requirements such as MCMAP and language training, vice the gym. Additionally, Marines will

¹⁰ LtGen George A. Flynn, MARADMIN 661/08, Release of the Rosetta Stone Language Learning Software, 21 Nov, 2008

¹¹ Maj Robert H. Duryea, "Physical Training Instructors: The Key to Combat Conditioning", Marine Corps Gazette

enjoy the benefit of achieving results faster and stay motivated to continue with the program.

Preparing Marines for the physical rigors of combat

Combat is physically taxing and demands a high level of physical fitness to facilitate success. However, as evident by the recent implementation of the CFT requirement, the current Marine Corps training program (outlined in Marine Corps Order P6100.12 (MCO P6100.12))¹² and PT test does not adequately meet the type of energy demands experienced in combat. For that reason, the Combat Fitness Test (CFT) is "...designed to complement the PFT and is characterized by anaerobic (short burst) energy demands".¹³ By coincidence, many of the advanced training programs, such as P90X, CrossFit, and Nike's Speed, Power, Agility, Reaction, and Quickness (SPARQ), offer training plans specifically tailored to provide the anaerobic short burst energy training required for the CFT, but most importantly, combat.

¹² MCO P6100.12, Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test and Body Composition Program Manual, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 10 May 2002, p. 1-3. The manual provides broad guidance on how a physical conditioning training plan should be constructed and executed. A specific training plan is not included.

¹³ General James T. Conway, *ALMAR 032/08, Changes to the Marine Corps Physical Fitness Program*, <http://www.marines.mil/news/messages/Pages/CHANGESTOTHEMARINECORPSPHYSICALFITNESSPROGRAM.aspx>

Advanced training programs, such as CrossFit, are popular amongst Marines because they foster competition against one another. This spirit of competition pushes Marines harder with additional effort because they are in a peer-set environment. The more effort that is exerted in a training environment, the more physically prepared a Marine is for combat. This type of effort was displayed in a CrossFit competition held by the Marines of Regimental Combat Team 5 (RCT-5) in Hit, Iraq during their recent deployment. "It was awesome; it was a challenge for everyone to go up there and do it. I think everyone enjoyed it, and they definitely felt the effects of it and are still feeling the effects of it," said Gunnery Sgt. Brian K. Keagy, 36, the assistant operations chief with H&S Co., from Nokomis, Ill. "It was worthwhile, and I'd definitely do it again."¹⁴

Many of the advanced training programs are time based allowing members to compete against each other and motivate one another. As seen in the previously mentioned article, this type of training opportunity inherently fosters a sense of esprit-de-corps as units compete against one another. Additionally, unit members feel a sense of accomplishment when "victory" is achieved, thus promoting positive morale amongst the Marines and its unit. Fortunately, the physical rigors of combat are better

¹⁴ Cpl Shawn Cummins, "CrossFit Competition Fuels Fitness", 24 Oct, 2008, (Cpl Cummins 2008)

met by those who are not only sound in body, but sound in mind and morale as well.

Counterargument: These advance training programs will exploit the Marine Corps

Many will argue that private business will exploit the fact that the Marine Corps has implemented some of its training techniques in order to sell their products or services to the public. While it is true that it does make good business sense to stamp the Marine Corps brand name on some of these products, the Marine Corps can mitigate this exploitation by reaching a legal agreement allowing the Marine Corps to use their programs under its own terms and agreements. A partnership can be achieved that is both beneficial to the business and the Marine Corps as an institution while maintaining the Marine Corps' integrity and best interest intact.

Counterargument: These advance training programs will be too challenging for some of the Marines and the Unit PT program will suffer low morale

Other opponents of the advanced training programs will argue that the techniques are too difficult for all of the Marines to perform due to their state of physical fitness, thus Unit PT programs will suffer low morale. Just as the current PT program¹⁵ allows for flexibility in the creation of its training

¹⁵ MCO P6100.12, *Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test and Body Composition Program Manual*, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 10 May 2002, p. 1-3. The manual provides broad guidance on how a physical conditioning training

sessions, these advanced training programs can be tailored to Marines that are not as physically fit as their peers. Marines are allowed to perform fewer repetitions as needed in a building block approach to get physically fit. Consequently, Unit PT programs can continue as before; with either goal of developing physically fit Marines or promoting unity and esprit-de-corps.

Recommendation: Integrate advanced Physical Training Programs into the Marine Corps

Commanders are faced with the awesome responsibility of preparing their Marines for combat in a time constrained environment with competing priorities. Marines are warriors, and their bodies must be physically fit to meet the challenges on the battlefield. By integrating the advanced training programs, the Marine Corps can seize the opportunity to better train Marines for the physical hardships of battle. The Marine Corps should also adapt a Warrior athlete mindset and approach the task of physically training Marines as an Olympian would prepare for the Olympics. Training opportunities should be maximized to receive results faster with those results devolving a potent, powerful Marine ready to meet mental and physical hardships. The Marine Corps should also lessen the financial burden on Marines who are currently paying out of pocket to join private gyms to

plan should be constructed and executed. A specific training plan is not included.

receive this training. Marines deserve the best training programs available to prepare them for the physical rigors of combat and by integrating the advanced training programs into the current physical fitness program, the Marines and Marine Corps will meet those challenges.

1,719 WORDS

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